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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 000260

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, EUR, NEA  
STATE PASS AID  
LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: ALL SIDES READY TO DELIVER A PARLIAMENT -  
- OR ARE THEY?

REF: NAIROBI 210

SUMMARY

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11. (C) The "Aden Declaration," signed by the Somali President and Speaker of the Parliament, provides an entry point to engage with the parties to the divided Transitional Federal Institutions. They, in turn, have asked the USG for specific diplomatic efforts to improve the environment for the convening of a session of the parliament. Our interlocutors are no less earnest -- nor less disingenuous -- than they were before. We will need to hold them to their word and make clear that if they fail, with their failure will go their jobs -- the TFIs will be no more. END SUMMARY.

SPEAKER AGAIN ASKS  
FOR "REASSURANCE"

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12. (C) Ambassador met January 16 with the Speaker of the Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP), Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden. The Speaker began by thanking Ambassador for the steadfast support of the USG. He said he knew that the U.S. had been with Somalia throughout the last 15 years, and pointed to what he characterized as the neutral position of the USG as having had a positive impact in breaking the political impasse of the past eight months. He opined that the USG had a reputation of even-handedness, and for saying "the right thing at the right time."

13. (C) Sharif Hassan updated Ambassador and Somalia Watcher on the two days of meetings he had been holding since meeting with Somalia Watcher January 13. He had gone to the airport January 15 in the company of Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi to greet TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed when the latter arrived in Nairobi from Addis Ababa. The three spent 40 minutes together -- a first since May 2005. They came together again the same night at Yusuf's Nairobi residence for several hours of discussions. The Speaker characterized the talks as entirely positive, with an agreement among themselves to hold back on expressing their preferences for the venue of the parliamentary session that

is to be held by February 5 (reftel), and allow consultations with MPs to bring about a consensus.

14. (C) The Speaker then turned to the subject he had broached two days earlier with Somalia Watcher, that of a concrete diplomatic contribution to the process of convening a session of parliament. He reiterated that the Mogadishu warlord-Ministers' point of objection would be a perceived threat of outside military intervention -- either covert or overt -- from Ethiopia, especially if Baidoa were chosen as the venue. He made it clear he was convinced that some members of the international community -- citing Italy and Ethiopia by name -- were resisting his recent efforts to unite the TFIs. He noted that Ethiopia certainly had the resources to be a disruptive influence anywhere they liked in Somalia, and had not been a particularly healthy influence anywhere in the region of recent date. That said, he was not convinced of the warlord's arguments that the threat was real. He suggested that perceptions were far more important than reality, and that the warlords were capable of using any excuse to avoid having to climb down from their hard line positions. Fueling this, in Sharif Hassan's opinion, was recent rhetoric from Addis Ababa including threats to enter Somalia to eliminate particular Islamist figures.

15. (C) The Speaker's key point was that measures were needed to accommodate the warlords, and that the weight of responsibility was on him to "deliver" them to a session of parliament. He asked for help to remove as many of their pretexts for not cooperating as could be managed. While noting his full understanding that the USG could not provide a guarantee of any sort, he nonetheless stated

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again that an indication from Washington of our desire to see a successful session of parliament, free of interference, would be a valuable card for him to play with the Mogadishu "heavyweights".

16. (C) Ambassador underscored that the USG was not able to provide any kind of security guarantee to the Somali warlords that could assuage their fears. But as the Somalis moved toward designating the venue for the session of parliament, we would be attentive to reactions, and would play a constructive role if and when that seemed possible. Ambassador told Sharif that the USG could certainly urge all external parties to be supportive of the parliamentary meeting.

PRIME MINISTER --  
I WON'T BE THE PROBLEM  
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17. (C) Ambassador had Prime Minister Gedi to the Residence January 17. The PM committed to acting constructively and in complete harmony with President Yusuf to implement the Aden Declaration. He agreed with the Speaker's assertion that the venue for a session of parliament must be determined through consultations with MPs. He turned to the Speaker's role, giving him the responsibility to "deliver" the warlords in Mogadishu, and setting a deadline of January 21 for a decision on the venue. He placed the burden of the work ahead squarely on the Speaker's shoulders, but told Ambassador that he could also play a role by making clear to the key Mogadishu minister/MP/warlords -- Mohamed Qanyare Afrah, Muse Sudi Yalahow, and Osman Hassan Ali (AKA "Atto") -- that the USG supported TFI unity.

18. (C) The PM suggested that an agenda for the first sessions of Parliament should include an attempt to put aside for the moment the individual grievances of the past, and to try to establish how the body is to function in practical matters, such as setting up operational committees to conduct the parliament's business. He opined

that moving quickly into a kind of "workshop" format for the sessions could keep MPs from trying to solve all Somalia's thorniest problems too quickly.

¶9. (C) The PM agreed with Ambassador that Islamic extremist elements in Somalia had benefited from the long political stalemate, and suggested that the move to finally unite the TFIs had agitated the hornets' nest. He said that these individuals -- especially those labeled Jihadists from among the Haber Gedir Ayr sub-clan of the Hawiye -- were actively pursuing plans to create an environment in which the TFIs would fail. He pointed vaguely at the January 13-15 fighting in Mogadishu between two prominent "businessmen" within the same Hawiye Abgal sub-clan as indicative of a Jihadist attempt to change the balance of power on the ground.

¶10. (C) When questioned on the issue, the PM suggested that there might be a possibility of reaching out to the disaffected Ayr community through the former president of the Transitional National Government, Abdiqassim Hassan Salad. The PM noted that Abdiqassim had sent messages through intermediaries indicating that he sought a role in the political process as befits a former president. "He wants respect", Gedi opined, "and we should be able to find a place in the protocol for him." That said, he maintained that the armed elements in the Ayr were intent on violence and disrupting any attempt at TFI unity. (COMMENT: Given Abdiqassim's background, he may very well become another spoiler. END COMMENT.)

¶11. (C) Ambassador told PM Gedi he would be willing to pass messages to ministers/warlords urging them to support the Aden declaration and to attend the parliamentary meeting. However, we made clear to the PM that he had a healthy portion of the responsibility to operationalize the Aden Declaration. If it were to be the Speaker's task to

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"deliver" the Mogadishu warlords, it would be the PM's to ensure that his rather-more compliant MP-allies turned up in large numbers at whatever venue was decided upon.

COMMENT:  
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¶12. (C) The PM interspersed his otherwise reasonable commentary with some remarkable examples of selective and creative memory. He claimed to be able to deliver up to 150 MPs to a session of parliament, when he is known to have a loose hold on a maximum of 60 -- none of whom are heavyweights or armed. And he put himself forth as the driving force behind the Aden meeting, though Yemen had called the President and Speaker together, and Gedi made no public statement of support for the January 5 Declaration until January 14.

¶13. (C) It took our direct questioning for him to admit that he would bear some of the blame should this initiative fail. He nonetheless did see that he and President Yusuf could play a role in splitting off former TNG President Abdiqassim from the more militant Ayr warlords. He made clear that from his perspective, the USG's influence would be best employed in somehow neutralizing the threat from the Haber Gedir Ayr "Jihadists".

¶14. (C) The Speaker has accepted his role in this last-ditch effort -- a hard selling job as he tries to bring Mogadishu MPs to a session of parliament, whether in Baidoa or anywhere else in Somalia. It would help him if he could say that the U.S. and other parties had spoken to the Ethiopians to urge them to do nothing (i.e., sponsor violence) that could torpedo a parliamentary meeting. Ambassador recommends that Department instruct regional Posts to urge appropriate interlocutor(s) in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Yemen and elsewhere in the region to be supportive

of the TFI/parliamentary initiative, as we will do in Kenya. Somali suspicion of particularly Ethiopian meddling and ill-intent may well be overblown, but there is no downside to letting regional governments know the USG supports the TFI initiative -- long shot though it may be -- and that we would like them to join us. END COMMENT.

BELLAMY